New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1948

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK POST

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"Seeds in the Wind"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 16, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

Turns Into Chaff

TONIO SELWART and a bunch of youngsters try hard to realise some of the tragedy of Lidice in "Seeds in the Wind." The Arthur Goodman play at the Empire broods over the aspirations of Czech orphans to found a children's international. The subject matter is strong. The treatment of this off-shoot production of the Experimental Theater is exactly the opposite. Occasionally the script gathers dramatic momentum as a Czech soldier is tried and found guilty of the grown-up crime of fostering war. More frequently, it falls flat on its face in attempting to establish a dubious major premise. The acting and the staging do not save this Eunice Healey-Harold Bromley offering from the worst aspects of amateurish make-believe.

• • •

Goodman has set his drama in the Carpathian Mountains, where pre-adolescent and adolescent survivors of the Lidice horror have set up house for three years. Under the leadership of a fiery stripling, played intensely by Sidney Lumet, the young ones have devised a scheme to spread a gospel of peace to those of their own age throughout the world. It is only when the army veteran arrives in their midst to tell them that the war is over that the cozy kiddy clan becomes badly embroiled. Tonya starts to shoot the aging warrior, but consents to a judicial procedure which results in the obister ostensibly going off to hang himself.

• • •

Aside from the fact that the orphaned left-overs of a war are not usually highly idealistic, "Seeds in the Wind" is a random and desultory play. In the course of three scenes, it permits its child actors to prattle endlessly before the somewhat disconcerting climax. Goodman may be right in thinking that the human wreckage of Lidice was capable of inspiring people to more sober thoughts about future world conflict, but he has not dramatized his idea. Without Selwart's solid portrayal of the Czech army veteran who turns a teen-age paradise topsy-turvy, the piece would have almost no import.

• • •

The actor plays quietly and sincerely. He has so little with which to work that the Empire offering is more of an aimless charade than an astringent play with a message. As his chief adversary Lumet is good enough and there are other helpful minor performances by Abby Bonime, Jerry Stone, Teddy Rose and Kenneth Terry. The truth is that for all of Paul Tripp's agile direction and the simple Ralph Alswang setting, "Seeds in the Wind" is a paltry theatrical celebration of a terrible event. At the ending one can only hope that the Czech hero forgot to hang himself.

'SEEDS IN THE WIND.'

Play by Arthur Goodman; directed by Paul Tripp; production designed by Ralph Alswang; presented by Eunice Healey and Harold Bromley at the Empire Theater Tuesday evening, May 25, 1948. The cast:

Stefan Jakubec	Tonio Selwart
Tonya	Sidney Lumet
Marta	Abby Bonime
Josef	Jerry Stone
Feldi	Teddy Rose
Grischa	Richard Kenny
Vladi	Donald Rose
Erko	Kenneth Terry
Jani	Jimmy Dutton
Carl	David Burke
Franz	Michael Citro
Nikos	Bobby Nick
Boris	Stanley Martin
Katerin	Mimi Strongin
Lina	Keia Linden
Phillipa	Winnie-Mae Martin
Maminkoe	Leo Graham

SYNOPSIS: Time: July, 1945. Place: A spot in the Carpathian Mountains in Czechoslovakia. Act I. Scene: Inside the house the children built. Act II. Scene 1: Outside the house—the same night. Scene 2: Same as Act I—the next day. Scene 3: Same as Act I—immediately after.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

May 16, 1948

Theater News

(Continued from page one)

be added to the dismal failures. In other words, out of every three productions opened during the course of a season during which about 100 plays are produced two are bound to be failures.

Theater Index Announced

The editors of "New York Theater Critics' Reviews," a compilation of the drama reviews in nine newspapers, announce the start of a reference record of the theater, covering approximately 600 plays from January 1, 1940, through December 31, 1948. The bound volume, which will be published early next year, will include an alphabetical index of plays, players, producers, directors and authors in action during the nine-year period. The title will be "New York Theater Critics' Reviews Index, 1940-1948." The volume will be designed chiefly as an auxiliary index to the nine volumes already published by the firm, but it can be used for limited reference without the volumes. The price will be $25, except to subscribers of the critics' reviews.

Theater Guild Plans

One of the most ambitious schedules for next season is listed by the Theater Guild, which cautiously announces that only [illegible]

The Sun

MAY 26, 1948

'SEEDS IN THE WIND' OPENS AT EMPIRE

Arthur Goodman hit upon a promising idea for a play in the situation he created for "Seeds in the Wind," which had its premiere last evening at the Empire Theater, but unfortunately for all concerned, his ingenuity quickly deserted him.

At the curtain's rise he has assembled a group of Czech youngsters, the majority of them survivors of the horror of Lidice, in a hideaway in the Carpathian Mountains. At their head are the two boys who enabled them to escape shipment to Nazi Germany. In the three years the little band has been in the wilderness, its older members have been striving to draft a plan to spare the children of the future the tragedy war has heaped on them. In the process distrust of grownups has become a cardinal tenet.

Finally in July of 1945 a member of the Czech underground stumbles upon their camp. He is kindly and wise and a patriot, and he is old enough to be the grandfather of any of them. The younger children take to him at once, but to the fiery young chiefs he is an enemy because he is of an older generation.

What transpires just before and after the group belatedly learns that Germany has surrendered furnishes the slight story. Along the way the playwright has contrived a scene or two of dramatic force, and several that are touching, but long before "Seeds in the Wind" reaches its unconvincing and early conclusion, he has frittered his idea away in implausibility and too much adolescent talk.

Tonio Selwart is so excellent as the lone grownup it is a pity that the author has not done more with the character. Sidney Lumet acts well as the oldest of the boys and his confession his parents were shot as collaborators is one of the evening's few highspots. Paul Tripp in his direction has guided several of the children into good performances, too, but the script defies cohesion.

"Seeds in the Wind" originally served as the initial bill in the Experimental Theater's Invitational Series at the Lenox Hill Playhouse last month. What led its present sponsors, Eunice Healy and Harald Bromley, to feel it was of Broadway stature is difficult to fathom.

HERRICK BROWN.

The New York Times

MAY 26, 1948

Arthur Goodman's 'Seeds in the Wind' Portrays Children of Lidice Renouncing the Adult World

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "Seeds in the Wind," acted at the Empire last evening, Arthur Goodman has seized a subject that cannot be pushed to one side. On a Carpathian mountain top he has assembled some Lidice orphans, bitter and disillusioned, who regard adults as their enemies. Since, philosophically, we all share in the guilt for the carnage of the world, Mr. Goodman is indicting us out of the mouths of little children. To that extent it is a soberly impressive theatrical experience.

This is the play put on recently without scenery at one of the Experimental Theatre's invitational series to general applause. For the Broadway Production Ralph Alswang has provided some skeletonized scenery. But Tonio Selwart is again playing the one adult part in the drama; and under Paul Tripp's sympathetic direction, the same young actors are conveying Mr. Goodman's rebuking idea.

* * *

After the horrors of the Lidice massacre, the children regard adults as the chief evil of the world. For three years they have been living on a mountaintop in an impromptu child's community under the leadership of a pair of adolescent boys and an adolescent girl. Out of a frightful experience they have banded themselves together to promote a child's world in which there will be no war or national boundaries. They live there happily until an adult Czechoslovakian soldier strays in and introduces an alien element. Although his heart is good and his intentions charitable, his presence wrecks the colony. Quite apart from his individual character, his adultness destroys the communal spirit.

* * *

Those scenes of contrast in the early and late portions of the play are the best Mr. Goodman has to offer. The spectacle of homeless children living in their own community is moving. Their suspicion of and burning hatred for a stray adult is also a moving idea which involves so many things that need not be spoken. And the trial of the adult by a children's court in the last act touches on some very sore points and provides a disturbing conclusion.

But "Seeds in the Wind" is not quite up to its best scenes. There is a long middle stretch of adolescent speculations that is hardly more than adolescent in Mr. Goodman's writnig. Saroyan might write those scenes with a kind of moonstruck poetry. Mr. Goodman brings no magic to them. And in general the theme of the children of Lidice ought to yield a more stirring drama than this wistful speculation. "Seeds in the Wind" is hardly more than an interesting attempt to get back to human fundamentals.

* * *

Although it is difficult to fit child actors of several ages into a coherent performance, Mr. Tripp has done it. He has blended the squeaky voices with the voices that begin to waver up and down. As the single adult actor, Tonio Selwart gives a kind and sincerely humble performance that is tactful and admirable. As the leader of the colony Sidney Lumet—no longer a child actor—plays with exceptional force and clarity. Abby Bonime acts the part of the little mother with considerable strength of character and Jerry Stone plays the political counselor of the community resourcefully.

There are many admirable things in "Seeds in the Wind," but Mr. Goodman has not quite made a fully wrought drama out of them.

New York World-Telegram

MAY 26, 1948

'Seeds in the Wind' Sprouts a New Idea

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Seeds in the Wind" has for a basic idea what ought to make exciting drama. A group of children, escaped from Lidice, have lived for three years in an isolated mountain community and have become more or less self sufficient.

Their dream is to form a world nation of only children. The harmony in which they have existed is disturbed by a grown man who discovers them. Blaming their new friction on him, they try him under threat of execution, but decide to let him go and continue their plans together.

Motivation Vague.

As it turns out, this play would be more interesting if it was downright bad. It is just dull.

The script is pedestrian and illogical, the acting usualy ordinary and the direction unimaginative.

The motivation is vague and confusing. One of the young leaders, Tonya, is in love with Marta. When the man Stafan arrives, Marta becomes devoted to him, as a sort of foster grandfather, and Tonya is jealous.

Production Simple.

The only possible explanation for the trial of Stefan is that Tonya twists facts to blame the older man. The schism which comes up in the group concerns whether or not they will permit German and Japanese children in their world state.

They split entirely on the basis of this issue, a quarrel which is neither begun nor stimulated by Stefan. Tonya simply insists that the mere presence of Stefan has precipitated the break. The truth is that Tonya is a highly unpleasant young man.

The production is done very simply at the merest suggestion of sets.

Tonio Selwart has the assignment of playing Stefan, who comes close to paying for all the crimes of mature humanity. He gives the role warmth and a pleasant good nature, though it is a confusing part because the issues are so garbled.

Sidney Lumet is intense and solemn as Tonya, and Jerry Stone is quietly effective as the brainier leader. Abby Bonime plays the girl Marta.

New York Post

MAY 26, 1948

'Seeds in the Wind' Has High Purposes

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

If a good heart and a passionately felt idea were enough to make a stalwart drama, we might today be hailing Arthur Goodman as a significent new dramatist and his play, "Seeds in the Wind," as a valuable addition to the late season. Instead, the work which came to the illustrious Empire Theatre last night from the laboratory of the Experimental Theatre must be set down as another wistful proof of the inadequacy of the best intentions when ineptly managed.

The moving contemporary theme of the plight of the homeless orphans of Europe, uprooted by the war, was recently handled with touching effectiveness in a short and neglected novel by Mai-Mai Sze, called "Silent Children." In "Seeds in the Wind," Mr. Goodman is considerably more emotional and infinitely less impressive as he, too, contemplates the tragedy of the displaced young as it is heightened by the impingement of a well-meaning adult refugee upon their bewildered world.

Survivors of Lidice

Mr. Goodman's children are presented as the survivors of the Nazi massacre at Lidice, who have banded together to form a state of their own in which war and hate will be banished and peace and companionship reign. It is their plan to cast out the evils of a corrupt adult civilization and establish a world of free youth, until a middle-aged soldier wanders into their midst and, despite his most idealistic intentions, brings the corruption of his maturity into their camp.

It is a poignant and provocative conception and might have made for a searching drama if it had not been ineffectively thought out and written. For one thing, the playwright keeps telling us that, before the coming of the refugee Czech soldier, the children had lived together in understanding and good will. Yet all the evidence he offers is that they were as brawling and unpleasant before his arrival as after it. For another, the leader of the youth is made unnecessarily churlish and dictator-minded.

Trial Scene

Then, in the end, there is a trial scene, in which the children try the invader for his sins and condemn him to death for betraying them by his failure to keep off the horror of war. It is an episode that is intended to supply the chief point of the play, but it seemed to me immeasurably weakened by one detail. The defendant was a Czech soldier who had fought to defend his country from the German scourge, and to indicate that, in his way, he was as guilty as a storm trooper struck me as dramatically defective.

All through a promising play the author wasted his theme through superficiality, flat dialogue, and the lack of ability to present his subject matter with a proper attention to its ideas and emotions. At the very least, some extensive re-writing was demanded. Although Tonio Selwart as the Czech soldier and Sidney Lumet and Abby Bonime as leaders of the children play earnestly, they are able to bring their roles to life only upon occasions. "Seeds in the Wind" is another unhappy play paved with splendid purposes.

Daily Mirror

MAY 26, 1948

'Seeds in Wind' Not Fertile

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The American National Theatre and Academy's Experimental Theatre first presented Arthur Goodman's "Seeds in the Wind," a revolutionary bedtime story, at special performances. Eunice Healey and Harald Bromley must not have seen it then.

For it is difficult to believe that Miss Healey and Bromley would have thought it worth while to transfer the silly script to the Empire Theatre as a commercial enterprise had they suffered through an actual showing of it, as did some of us last night.

"Seeds in the Wind" has to do with a group of children from Lidice and Prague who take refuge in the Carpathian Mountains after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. There they determine to unite the children of the world to war on adults in the interest of peace.

All the world's ills are caused by grown-ups. Children are pure and idealistic. They hate strife. They should seize, by force if necessary, half the globe's lands and set up their own gypsy-like regime. They should spurn their misguided parents. So thinks author Goodman.

For the sake of conflict, Goodman has a Czech underground hero come to the children's hideout. They accept him at first, then drive him forth as an enemy of children, a war-minded patriot, a subtle destroyer of ideals. They will take no advice of their elders. They will learn government, medicine, etc., from books.

We wonder if Goodman has ever attended school? Didn't he learn there that children can be infinitely more cruel than grown-ups? Has he ever seen a peaceful school ground? Has he ever watched more than two children assembled at one time? Didn't they quarrel? Wasn't the intervention of their elders a blessing?

We suspect that Goodman has been reading Plato's "Republic" too avidly. Hegel, Marx and Engels are credited in the popular mind as the fathers of totalitarianism, of the police state. But Plato conceived the idea long before they arrived to set the world on fire.

Plato, too, thought it would be wonderful to change the thinking of future generations. Philosophers would destroy all books, all songs and write new ones. Yes, good old Plato suggested book burning and "noble" dictatorship—all dictatorships are "noble" in eyes of the power-mad men who create them—long before Hitler and Stalin ever got around to it.

"Seeds in the Wind" is played before drapes and with a handful of props designed by Ralph Alswang. Paul Tripp directed.

Tonio Selwart is the only adult in the cast, though Sidney Lumet, Abby Bonime and Jerry Stone are nearing the age when they would be suspect in Goodman's children's world-state. The acting is excellent. But the play. You can have it. I don't want it. It's too fatuous for me.

DAILY NEWS

MAY 26, 1948

'Seeds in Wind' a Dreary Drama About a World Plot by Children

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If all the plays with good intentions were permitted to remain just because of their noble motives, Broadway would be paved knee-high with turkeys. And the newest of them would be "Seeds in the Wind," which found itself in the Empire Theatre last evening.

This drama by Arthur Goodman, which was presented recently at the Lenox Hill Playhouse as part of the invitational series of the Experimental Theatre, has a good idea. This idea is stated in the first couple of minutes, and after that neither Mr. Goodman nor his mob of juvenile actors can figure out where to go.

The result is a remarkably repetitive, ill-directed little piece which does not measure up to the standards of the professional theatre.

Twice Mr. Goodman has had an interesting idea. A good many years ago he had one which was told almost completely by its title, "If Booth Had Missed"—and he gave this notion an interesting dramatic development. Again, in "Seeds in the Wind," he presents an intriguing premise.

Fed Up With Elders.

A group of children who somehow survived the massacres of Lidice and other villages have hid-

des away until the war's end in the Carpathian Mountains of Czechoslovakia. They have become self-reliant, and have formulated a plan to install children as rulers of the world. Obviously, up to now, grown-ups have botched the job, and, furthermore, grownups don't care a hoot about children or they wouldn't all the time be starting wars.

This is fine—but it takes only a couple of minutes. Then the kids take prisoner one Tonio Selwart, an actor with a Willie Howard haircut and an Elisabeth Bergner accent. Selwart, being a kindly grandfather, undermines the children's resolve to rule the world by teaching them songs and promising to make them shoes.

Stage Safe for Adults.

The last I remember of the play —and I saw it all, for it is short— the moppets had tried Tonio for his life, on the charge of being a grownup, and after convicting him had suspended sentence by kicking him out. World government by children didn't seem any nearer— nor, mercifully, did domination of the Broadway stage by juvenile actors loom as an imminent threat.

Sidney Lumet plays the ringleader, or dictator, of the youthful band. If I want any more ringleaders of short-pants uprisings I'm going back to "Peter Pan," in which Peter heaves an alarm clock into the gullet of a crocodile and makes things exciting as all get-out. Or, if not that, "Hansel and Gretel," in which the kids worst a witch.

Journal American

MAY 26, 1948

Experimental Play Meets Tough Going

By ROBERT GARLAND

Before any more sensitive theatre-minded idealists get themselves hurt and blame show business for the hurt, somebody must remind them that to see a play in an off-Broadway library basement is one thing and that to see the same play in an on-Broadway commercial theatre is definitely another.

It's last night's "Seeds in the Wind" I've got particularly in mind, the Arthur Goodman play which, in their theatre-minded idealism, Eunice Healey and Harald Bromley took from a library basement on Lenox Hill and transferred all too hopefuly to the lovely, but commercial, old Empire.

Uptown, on E. 70th St., Mr. Goodman's tragic fantasy of youth, war and the cussedness of the so-called human race, turned out to be a not unstimulating adventure in amateur playgoing. In a library basement on Lenox Hill, it was a cocky little try-out for the Experimental Theatre.

But now, downtown below Times Square, with commercial competition on every side, it's something else again. That something else is not, I fear, a practical piece of professional onstage make-believe.

In this "Seeds in the Wind," playwright Arthur Goodman starts out with the implausible, but provocative, idea of a brave new world in which children hold full sway. The children of his choosing make up an intergrated group of boy and giri refugees from Czechoslovakia's Lidice.

For three years they've governed themselves in a spot high up in the Carpathian Mountains. Under the leadership of Tonya, the oldest — unfortunately for them — member of the group, they've lived peacefully together on vegetables, nuts and a deep distrust of adults.

All might have gone well— although I doubt it—had not Stefan Jakubec come drifting in with a revolver in his hand and cowardly old world ideas on his venerable grey-topped mind. From the moment of his arrival, the children's brave new world begins to crumble onto their unhardened shoulders.

Suspicion, sex, even jury duty, raise their reptilian heads in this Garden of Eden, Junior. And, before "Seeds in the Wind" is over, it's not unlike a W. S. Gilbert libretto without Sir Arthur's music.

With no more than one adult acting part, the mummery at the Empire is indeed extraordinary. Under Paul Tripp's overall direction, 16 or more professional youngsters give a fine account of themselves. Only once in a while is their diction faulty because of a lack of clarity.

Among the performing youngsters, Sidney Lumet is notable. In all his 22 years, with almost four out for the Army, you could have seen him in "Dead End," "Morning Star" and "Brooklyn, U. S. A." But you couldn't have seen him to better advantage than as Tonya, the children's coming-of-age leader.

The others are mostly worthy. And it's interesting to notice that, with almost no exceptions, the boys are more effective and less affected than the girls. There's one affected boy, however. He sits up on a fence, looks up at the spotlight and talks patronizingly of God. His printed name eludes me.

Tonio Selwart, who goes in for "wind" plays—"Candle in the Wind," "Temper the Wind," now "Seeds in the Wind" — acts Stefan Jekubec, the lone grown-up, with accented sincerity . . . It's sorry I am that his new play is of no such stuff as Broadway long runs are made!

"The Vigil"

New York Post

MAY 23, 1948

A Play on the Resurrection Done in Modern Clothes

By Richard Watts Jr.

Maybe there should be a law against veteran Hungarian dramatists writing mystical plays on religious themes. A season ago the eminent Ferenc Molnar made everyone unhappy by giving us a lugubrious work called "Miracle in the Mountain," which was an embarrassingly unpersuasive defence of simple faith. Friday night at the Royale Theatre a less notable scrivener from Budapest named Ladislas Fodor, who once wrote a Ruth Gordon vehicle entitled "A Church Mouse," came forward with something described as "The Vigil," which is a modern-clothes retelling of the story of the Resurrection, set in a courtroom. It is terrible.

Even though "Miracle in the Mountain" was one of Molnar's worst plays, it wasn't really bad enough to be compared with "The Vigil," and the fact that both were the product of Dunubian playwrights now living in America is hardly justification for doing so. Nevertheless there is a certain unfortunate similarity which does provide reason for the comparison. The two works reveal sophisticated and fairly cynical dramatists attempting to make us believe that they are humble and pious men pleading the cause of mystic faith against the blandishments of scientific skepticism.

Such a writer as G. K. Chesterton could persuade one that his piety was the real thing, and his advocacy of faith against materialistic doubt could be deeply moving. When Molnar and Fodor try it, the defence is hollow and fraudulent, and it seems the result of a rather shabby pose.

Furthermore, when Fodor does it, intense boredom is the result. I suppose there have been worse dramas in town this year than "The Vigil." But few of them have been duller, less dramatic and more lacking in any suggestion of dramatic shrewdness. It is an ambitious drama without

'THE VIGIL.'

Play by Ladislas Fodor; directed by Alexander Marker; settings and lighting by Yellenti, presented by Alexander Markey, by arrangement with George Jessel, at the Royale Theater Friday evening, May 21, 1948.

The cast:

Violet	Louise Jones
Mr. Woods	John Seymour
Judge	Edward Van Sloan
Court Clerk	Tony Dowling
Court Stenographer	Lee Baxter
Courtroom Guard	Rand Elliot
Prosecutor	Harry Wilcoxon
Counsel for Defense	Ian MacDonald
The Gardener	Tom Fadden
Assistant to the Prosecutor	Andrew George
Assistant to the Defense	Tom Donovan
Esther	Mary James
Lostus	Dennis King Jr.
Mr. Pinchas	Joe E. Marks
Joseph of Arimathea	Lauren Gilbert
Lady Procula	Muriel Hutchison
Pontius Pilate	Guy Spaull
Saul of Tarsus	Milton Parsons
Beulah	Helen Beamon
Badoc	King Donovan
Susanna	Ann Pearce
Prof. Thaddeus	Dan Reed
Mary Magdalen	Maria Palmer
Simon	Walter Palance

"The Vigil"—*continued*

justification for its ambitions.

Courtroom Play

I used to think that no dramatist could write a courtroom play that didn't have a certain inherent theatrical effectiveness. Now I know better. In "The Vigil," it has been the author's plan to bring in such witnesses as Mary Magdalen, Pontius Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, Saul of Tarsus and Simon Peter to testify in a modern American court in the trial of a humble gardner, who is accused of hiding the dead body of the crucified Jesus. The audience is supposed to be the jury, and there is no doubt that Mr. Fodor is quite literally on the side of the angels. But it is such a dull trial.

There is no doubt that the play's intention is to be devout, eloquent, and completely honest in its appeal for the literal truth of religious faith. But there is no believable devoutness, no true eloquence and very little appearance of honesty in the writing. It is all flat, colorless, unconsciously tawdry, and unintention ally a little vulgar. The playwright's aspirations may be lofty, but his achievements are anything else. There is not a moment in the drama which indicates a quality of mind or emotion beyond the commonplace.

From Hollywood

The production of "The Vigil," by the way, arrives direct from Hollywood. There are those who believe it is a fine thing to cast and produce plays in the cinema capital, where actors are plentiful and costs are less than in New York, and then bring them to us for metropolitan approval. Despite libels to the contrary, drama critics are almost wistfully kind to California actors, but I must say that so far I have seen no evidence that this Hollywood-to-New York plan is about to introduce a theatrical renaissance. "The Vigil" is almost as badly done as the previous importation from the West, "The Rats of Norway."

Only in a few of the minor roles did I find any cheering moments. Dan Reed, who was so delightful as the little man who was a student of park benches in "Hope Is the Thing with Feathers," is amusing as a little man who is a student of angels. I must confess, though, that I would rather hear him talk about parks. King Donovan has a few entertaining moments as a dubious private detective. Muriel Hutchison, who has been away from the local stage a long time, appears pleasantly as Pontius Pilate's wife, and a new girl named Ann Pearce is prettily appealing as a browbeaten witness for the defence. I feel sorry for the actors who have to sit on the stage throughout the entire play.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MAY 22, 1948

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Sermon

THE Ressurection has been made the subject of a modern dress courtroom melodrama in "The Vigil." The Ladislas Fodor play at the Royale is alway reverent. It is not by any means dramatically effective. Despite a gallery of impressive portrayals, this Alexander Markey-George Jessel production is a slithering modern miracle play. The author has never surely established the background for his contemporary counterpart to a supposed investigation into the divinity of Jesus. He has had great aid from the Gospels, but the craftsmanship is so untidy that much of the exposition takes the form of mere sermonizing. The matter of "The Vigil" has far more import than its most recent relating.

* * *

It has been Feder's notion to stage a trial of the gardener as a grave-robber "in any small American town." Obviously the prosecutor and defense counsel are more interested in the Resurrection than the guilt of the pious Jew who is supposed to have invaded a tomb between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. They summon a parade of witnesses, including Mary Magdalen, Pontius Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, Saul of Tarsus and Simon called Peter. Occasionally, the play succeeds in making a striking modern parallel with the events described, particularly when Pilate appears in a white linen suit to discuss the problems of a governor. For the most part it relies heavily on accepted source material and artful acting.

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Maria Palmer achieves the most affecting moments in the offering as Mary Magdalena, heckled by the prosecutor, but secure in her faith. The scene in which she strikes the gardener, to demonstrate that she was not mistaken in having seen the risen Christ, is good theater. Henry Wilcoxon is fine as the prosecutor and so is Ian MacDonald as the attorney for the defense. Their examinations and cross-examinations of witnesses grow very trying after three acts for all their sincere efforts. "The Vigil" is something of an animated sermon with less eloquence and little more excitement than most sermons have.

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The bits are generally fine. Walter Palance is splendid as the fisherman who describes the miraculous haul he had on the shores of Galilee. Milton Parsons is excellent as Saul and as the converted Paul who is brought in for a second hearing and Muriel Hutchison has some of the better lines of a laggard script as Lady Procula. Markey has staged the production with more animation than one might have expected in a series of witness stand declarations and Yellenti has given it a suitable decor. "The Vigil" is earnest as it makes the audience the jury in a judicial probing of Christianity, but it is unkempt and tedious.

DAILY NEWS

MAY 22, 1948

Even If You Got to See 'The Vigil' You Probably Wouldn't Believe It

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The strangest play of the season (Chapman, News) is "The Vigil," by Ladislas Fodor, which appeared last evening at the Royale Theatre. In the courtroom style of "The Trial of Mary Dugan," it presents the events and opinions which might have taken place or been held in the three-day interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it does this in modern dress, with the time being the present and the scene "a courtroom in any small town in the United States."

"The Vigil" could have been much worse than it is, for producer Alexander Markey has rounded up some earnest and persuasive players for a drama which is posy, pretentious and, to me, frequently offensive. Henry Wilcoxon, Maria Palmer, Ian MacDonald and a newcomer named King Donovan are so intent upon their work and so good at it that they deserve some kind of award like this mention for devoting themselves to so goofy a project.

Mr. Fodor, a screenwriter, has dreamed up a scenario in which a gardener is on trial in a small U. S. town at the present moment for having, as the prosecution claims, opened the tomb of Jesus, removed the body and buried it in a stream bed in furtherance of a plot to cook up a supernatural event which by now has become known as the resurrection.

Told in Vernacular.

I am not being callous or flippant in reporting the few details of the drama in the foregoing paragraph. Mr. Fodor's script is couched in what he thinks is current courtroom vernacular. For instance, a witness named Beulah testifies, "I work at the Damascus gate—it's a hangout for Roman soldiers." Mr. Fodor doesn't bother to explain who paid her fare from the Damascus gate to his U. S. courtroom.

Among the witnesses are, of course, Mary Magdalen (Miss Palmer); Pontius Pilate, Saul of Tarsus, Susanna and Simon called Peter. Mr. Wilcoxon, acting like a gang buster, is the prosecutor and Mr. MacDonald is defending the gardener from the charge of being a ghoul. When the trial is over, the judge tells the jury—which is the audience, of course—to make up its own mind. I think Mr. Fodor favors or endorses Christian beliefs.

Well, as I say, it's strange play, and why anybody would ever want to produce it, let alone write it, I don't know. It has been said that the brains behind the thing is George Jessel, a Hollywood producer who once very creditably acted the role of the Biblical Joseph, and that Mr. Jessel thinks "The Vigil" might make a movie.

If Mr. Jessel had ever listened to his mother on that telephone, instead of talking to her all the time, she might have taught him some sense.

The New York Times

MAY 22, 1948

Bible in Modern Dress

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Ladislas Fodor has done one remarkable thing. He has made the story of the resurrection seem tedious and commonplace. In "The Vigil," which was solemnly acted at the Royale last evening, he has reduced the gospel to the level of a monotonous courtroom story. In the past Mr. Fodor has been celebrated less for his piety than for the nimbleness of such hack pieces as "I Love an Actress," which did not have Ruth Gordon in it, and "A Church Mouse," which did. But even if Ruth Gordon, Judith Anderson and Frank Sinatra appeared in "The Vigil," Mr. Fodor would sound like a presumptious bore.

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For the story of the resurrection, from which, incidentally, the modern drama is derived, is a theme for poets, sages and music-makers with a spark of the divine fire. In a whimsical mood Mr. Fodor has related it in terms of a contemporary American court trial, and has summoned for his witnesses Joseph of Arimathea, Pontius Pilate, Saul of Tarsus and Mary Magdalene. Even in modern dress, that is quite a cast.

It is difficult to understand what Mr. Fodor thought he was contributing to the scriptures by representing the characters as rather supercilious Americans. But two things are obvious. Nothing is more tiresome than the formal courtroom technique for telling a story, "The Trial of Mary Dugan" to the contrary notwithstanding. And Mr. Fodor as a writer has none of the imagination, eloquence or scholarship that might make his conception of the resurrection worth listening to.

As an episode in theatre, "The Vigil" offers the trite situation of two attorneys shouting angrily at each other while a lot of witnesses enter, play brief character sketches in the witness docket and exit to applause. Dull as a play, "The Vigil" also represents bankruptcy of taste. The gospel according to Fodor is cheap, plodding and wordy.

Daily Mirror

MAY 22, 1948

'Vigil' Tells Story Of Biblical Trial

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It required courage for Alexander Markey, by arrangement with George Jessel, to produce Ladislas Fodor's "The Vigil," for plays with religious backgrounds seldom prove commercial successes on Broadway. And we doubt that the new arrival at the Royale Theatre will be an exception to the rule.

"The Vigil" has to do with the trial of a gardener, employed by Joseph of Arimathea, for stealing the body of Christ from its sepulcher and burying it in a grave beneath an irrigation canal. The gardener pleads innocent. Witnesses are introduced by the prosecution and defense, through whom the story of the Resurrection and events leading up to it are unfolded.

The "courtroom is in any small town in the United States on the nights between Good Friday and Easter Sunday." The characters appear in modern dress, and the jurors are the members of the audience.

Your decision, should you see the play, probably will be determined by your religious training, by the belief in which you have been reared.

Fodor's characters are vividly etched. He captures their backgrounds and philosophies in compact capsules. Their speech is colloquial, often eloquent, sometimes deeply moving and constantaly revealing.

Producer Markey has cast and staged "The Vigil" admirably. The acting is superlative.

"The Vigil" is a sincere, earnest and literat play.

Henry Wilcoxon, as the cynical prosecutor, and Ian MacDonald, as the able counsel for the defense, give performances so real that we suspect so discerning a critic of legal talent as Judge Sam Leibowitz would applaud them.

Maria Palmer plays Mary Magdalen with evocative emotion and effective simplicity. Edward Van Sloun is excellant as the judge.

The Sun

MAY 22, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Don't Bother About 'The Vigil.'

Biblical drama, this time about the Resurrection, reached the New York stage last night as "The Vigil" was presented at the Royale. This new piece is completely exhausting. It is as tiresome a drama as the season has brought forth, and I'm not forgetting such items as "The Men We Marry" and "The Cup of Trembling."

Ladislas Fodor, who writes for the screen, turned out "The Vigil." Friends and associates got the production money together, a cast was assembled, scenery was built and the project was sent eastward with George Jessel's blessings. But he wasn't a sufferer last night. He wasn't at the Royale.

The locale of "The Vigil" is a court room. It is one, as the playbill tells you, "in any small town in the United States." It is populated by New Testament characters in modern clothes, speaking the language of the present day, and for three interminable acts the proceedings have to do with the trial of the Gardener on the charge of stealing the body of Jesus Christ from His tomb, following the crucifixion.

Now, I well know of the susceptibility of audiences to trials upon the stage and that the mere sight of a court room—and certainly such a compact one as Yellenti has designed—will immediately quicken the interest of a playgoer. I admit having been fascinated by stage trials all the way from "Madame X" to "Mary Dugan." But "The Vigil" is quite something else. It is repetitious and pretentious and deadly dull, and as it goes its ponderous way the bickering between the Prosecutor and the Counsel for the Defense continues endlessly.

Henry Wilcoxon snarls and bellows as the Prosecutor trying to prove that the Resurrection was the greatest hoax in history. Ian MacDonald does what he can—and a lot of it well enough—as the defense counsel, struggling to convince the jury that a miracle followed the death of Jesus on Calvary. Maria Palmer, wearing a gown of periwinkle jersey silk, has an emotional holiday in the role of Mary Magdalen, who appears as the principal witness for the defense; she offers the testimony that she saw Jesus in the Garden after He had risen and that He spoke to her.

Tom Fadden brings a strong voice to the character of the bearded, bewildered gardener, who tells the court that he found the tomb empty and the stone rolled away on Easter Sunday. He resolutely denies the body-stealing charge. Milton Parsons, as Saul of Tarsus, is the most convincing of the witnesses.

The Pontius Pilate of "The Vigil"—played by Guy Spaull—is a man in a jaunty Palm Beach suit and sports shoes, and the Simon Peter—this is Walter Palance's part—is a young giant in fisherman's boots who scares the daylights out of the bullying prosecutor.

"The Vigil," a faith-versus-logic drama, leaves the final decision to the jury, which is the audience. As a member of last night's jury my verdict is this:

"The Vigil" is an overpowering bore.